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C O N F I D E N T I A L OTTAWA 000159

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TAGS: PREL MOPS IZ AF CA
SUBJECT: CANADA APPLAUDS IRAQ STRATEGY REVIEW, BUT FOCUSES
ON AFGHANISTAN

REF: A. STATE 18283
1B. OTTAWA 134 (NOTAL)

Classified By: PolMinCouns Scott Bellard, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C/NF) Canada welcomed the new U.S. administration's review of Iraq policy (ref a), especially since it will free up more U.S. combat troops for Afghanistan, according to Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Iraq desk officer David Leach. Canada recognizes the importance of Iraq to the international community and has welcomed the "dramatic improvement" in security, Leach commented. He added that Canada also realizes that it must find ways -- consistent with its relatively limited resources -- to respond to the new strategy and situation on the ground. Leach noted that Canada was now looking to rebuild its diplomatic presence in Iraq. The Canadian political counselor in Amman will double his temporary duty travel to Iraq from two weeks out of every eight to spend a total of six months of the year there. Leach lamented that Canada was now the only G-8 country without an embassy in Baghdad, but it is closely monitoring the security situation and reviewing the financial implications while searching for a suitable property on which to build a new embassy in Baghdad. The discussions over the suitability and timing for a new mission are taking place at the Assistant Deputy Minister level (Under Secretary equivalent), which Leach commented bodes well for a positive decision.

¶2. (C/NF) While Canada welcomes the new Iraq policy, it is not, however, inclined to make a public statement of support, according to Leach, given its limited role in Iraq and Canada's overriding foreign policy focus on Afghanistan. Canada is still on track to meet its 2003 Iraq pledge of C\$300 million in aid, Leach emphasized, but admitted that the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) will be winding down its operations in 2010 after meeting this commitment. Leach added that he was not aware of any planning for new CIDA projects in Iraq after 2010. Canada is also due to fulfill its 2004 pledge of C\$400 million in debt relief through the Paris Club process by 2010.

¶3. (C/NF) Comment: The government under Prime Minister Harper has made Canada's role in Afghanistan its number one foreign policy priority, after U.S.-Canadian relations. Afghanistan also remains Canada's largest aid recipient. Canada's Minister for International Cooperation recently announced (ref b) that Canada had further reduced its priority list of aid recipients from 25 to 20; Iraq was not among the 20. However, Canada's chairmanship of the G-8 in 2010 may provide additional incentive to get on the ground in Baghdad soon and to reconsider its future aid plans for Iraq. End comment

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